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C O N T E N T S

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 1998

Best Bath p. 38

*A couple decides to simplify the Edwardian style bathroom in their 1885 New Jersey house Before they can say "Carrara marble," they've moved a load bearing wall and rerouted the plumbing The result is a master bath that's functional and elegant*

BY CURTIS RIST

FEATURES

CAPE COD LOVE AFFAIR, P 88

GOOD WOOD, P 62

Key West and Conchs 58

*Winter's here, which means you'll find* This Old House *down in sunny Florida, tackling a makeover in Margaritaville* BY JACK MCCLINTOCK

Buying Good Lumber 62

This Old House *contractor Tom Silva goes shopping at his favorite lumberyard and reveals his secrets for finding the best wood.* BY RICHARD STEPLER

An American Craftsman's House 70

*In Sonoma Valley, California, blacksmith Carl Jennings built himself a stone yurt, a showplace for his graceful, complex ironwork.* BY JACK MCCLINTOCK

Fireplace Fix 76

*At* This Old House*'s project in Watertown, Massachusetts, cast iron inserts make inefficient Victorian fireplaces work a lot better* BY JOSEPH D'AGNESE

The Great Cape 80

*The Pilgrims knew a good thing, which may explain why the Cape Cod—the little house with the big roof—is still America's favorite* BY JOSEPH D AGNESE

Dream House: First-Rate Framing 88

*From cellar to roof ridge, a master framer analyzes the early stages of* This Old House *magazine's Dream House in Wilton, Connecticut* BY BRAD LEMLEY

Igloo 94

*With the right snow, all you need to build a snowhouse is a pair of hands, one or two simple tools and a trace of genetic memory.* BY STEPHEN HARRIGAN

The Poster: Door Handles 101

*With every opening and closing, with every click of a latch, the perfect front-door hardware says, "Welcome home "* BY JOSEPH D AGNESE

SOUTHERN CHARM, P 50

COVER: CARRARA MARBLE AND A VICTORIAN-STYLE FIXTURE REVIVE A BATHROOM IN A 19TH-CENTURY HOUSE PHOTOGRAPH BY GRANT DELIN SEE STORY, P 38

SEE FROM TOP: GRANT DELIN; ANDREW KAUFMAN; GRANT DELIN; ANDREW KAUFMAN

(Continued on page 8)

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UP FRONT


(extras)

18 Flab Busters

Ultra-Bungalows

22 See the *T.O.H.* Guys

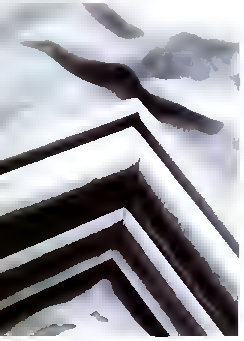
Simple Cord Tamer

23 Timberline Lodge

Cyber-Contractors

Laser Measure

WARM WOOD, P. 29



MIGHTY MITER, P. 19


*He Says/She Says*

What a Kitchen Should Be **15**

*Men and women really do think about houses differently*

By Brock Yates and Jeanne Marie Laskas

*Materials We Love*

Three Cheers for Cherry **29**

*Norm Abram's favorite wood has a luscious auburn hue that needs no stain—to darken a piece, just leave it in sunlight.*

By Richard Stepler

*Luxuries*

Coffered Ceiling **36**

*Create a cross pattern of decorative timbers to beam about.*

By Curtis Rist

*Finances*

The Insurance Gap **51**

*Say good-bye to home owner's policies that cover everything*

By Peter Keating

LOG WILD, P. 53


*Architecture*

For the Love of Logs **53**

*No house style exemplifies our national identity as sweetly as the humble log cabin—just think of Lincoln's birthplace*

By Curtis Rist


PLUS


Contributors 10 Letters 12 Ask Norm 24

Letter From *This Old House* 97 Directory 103

TV Schedule 104 Classics Program Guide 108

Save This Old House 126

CRISSCROSS, P. 36

PHOTOS: CHAIR: DAVID PRINCE; BEAM: GRANT HELLIN; LOG HOUSE: CHERYL LINDAR; FRAME: MICHAEL GRIMM.

FOR INFORMATION ABOUT MANUFACTURERS, MATERIALS, PRODUCTS AND RESOURCES, SEE DIRECTORY, P. 103

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**STEPHEN HARRIGAN** grew up in semitropical Corpus Christi, Texas, where, he says, winter activities such as ice skating "seemed like things that take place on another planet." Before traveling to the arctic to research "Igloo" (page 94), Harrigan had seen snow only a half dozen times. After watching Jack Kabvitok, a native of Canada's Nunavut region, construct an igloo, Harrigan attempted to build his own, miniature version. "You have to have such a sure hand," he says. "The snow blocks have to be made precisely." On-site, even taking notes became complicated. "I forgot that ink freezes inside the pen at certain temperatures. I had to borrow a pencil from Jack." A contributor to *Texas Monthly* and *Audubon*, Harrigan also wrote the script for the CBS movie *Beyond the Prairie: The True Story of Laura Ingalls Wilder*, to be broadcast in early 1999.

"I like to feel like a teenager every day," says photographer **ANDREW KAUFMAN**. "I like to keep the innocence—the wide eyes—to see new things." He keeps his outlook fresh by shooting the far flung and the esoteric: a monster-truck show in Ohio or political turmoil in Indonesia. For "The Great Cape" (page 80), he drove up and down the Eastern Seaboard of the United States, searching for interesting specimens. "Madison, Connecticut, was my favorite place," Kaufman says. "I liked the openness of its landscape, the beach town, small-community feel." His work has appeared in *Sports Illustrated* and *Unlimited*.

Writer **JACK McCLINTOCK** has designed and built two houses and is keeping one more project simmering in his mind. "I'd like the perfect, final house for one person: myself," he says. He describes his architectural style as "single-handed idiosyncratic." Prospective hometowns include San Francisco and Seattle. "Circles of Life" (page 70) took him to California's Sonoma Valley, where he discovered craftsman Carl Jennings, a "fascinating anachronism who kept his iron age trade alive into the computer age and now is turning that same brutish metal into graceful vases and busts." McClintock lives in Miami with his cat, Slim.

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**Light Mouse-Cleaning**

I once worked in an office that was invaded by field mice. We tried every gadget the pest-control company provided, including some of the ones mentioned in your article ["When There's a Mouse in the House," November 1998]. Then, at one point, when I mopped the tile floors, I added bleach to the wash water. Within a few days the mice were gone. I mentioned this to the pest-control person on his next visit, and he said, "Oh, mice don't like chlorine."

JEANNETTE DECHENNE, *Spokane, Wash.*

**Beyond the Pail**

Another use for empty drywall buckets ["Life After Drywall," Extras, November 1998] is as part of a cheap, portable hand-and-face-washing system for construction sites (copied from a Grand Canyon raft expedition company's system). Buy a heavy-duty gasoline bulb siphon with a check valve, like those that come with outboard-motor tanks. Check and, if necessary, reverse hoses for length reasons. Bend a piece of ⅝-inch copper tubing into a J shape. With electrical clamps, fasten the long length of the hose to the inside bottom of the bucket. Affix the shorter hose to the straight end of the J tubing, and fasten the tubing to the exterior of the bucket on the opposite side. Be sure the arrow on the bulb points from the water toward the J bulb. Some of the hose should lie on the ground. Affix the hose to a plywood plate. Fill the bucket with Colorado River (or equal) water, and then step on the bulb until the water flows. Add soap and towels and maybe even another bucket to catch dirty water. We use such a rig on Habitat for Humanity projects, where dirty hands at lunchtime used to be common and wash water scarce.

BUD BOOTHE, *Westfield, N.J.*

**Contractor Quest**

I loved the article "Finding a Good Contractor" [November 1998]. We are having our kitchen redone and have been frustrated with our search for reputable contractors. Many of your suggestions were very helpful and gave me a great resource at just the right time. Your suggestion to call the local building inspector's office, however, was a dead end for me. My local building inspector's office said they could not give out references. But thank you for all the other information. Keep up the great work!

GRANT DIXON, *Chicago*

**Revisionism Run Amok?**

Your grasp of the architectural significance of James Madison's estate ["Montpelier," November 1998] may be thorough, but your grasp of international history is a bit shaky. You suggest that, during his Presidency, James Madison presided over the "thumping of England in the War of 1812." In fact, England was not thumped. English soldiers, Canadians who were loyal to the crown, and more than 2,000 Iroquois aboriginal people rebuffed an invasion into sovereign English territory. Many historians consider that, at best, the war ended in a draw. For the rest of the century, Canadians had to cope with saber rattling and hot gusts of southern air blustering about the Monroe Doctrine's silly concept of manifest destiny before they finally got the international border sorted out.

MAUREEN PENDERGAST, *Winnipeg, Canada*

**And Where Are They Now?**

I am extremely fond of your section, in the back of every magazine, devoted to saving houses destined for destruction [Save This Old House]. The charm and beauty these houses potentially have is intriguing. Yet, after they are showcased, you never hear of them. If you could fill me in on the fate of any of these structures, it would be greatly appreciated. Possibly even an article on the houses and what's being done with them. You have a wonderful show and a publication to match.

BRIAN GUTH, *St. Louis*

*Look for a* Save This Old House *update—complete with "before" and "after" pictures—in a future issue.*

**Tapped Out**

As a subscriber, I enjoy your publication. I was pleased to see your article about frost-proof spigots ["A Tap for All Seasons," September/October 1998]. I have a few concerns about your installation. Your article did not mention that there needs to be proper drainage pitch to ensure the frost-proof spigot drains out all of the water; otherwise, it could freeze and burst, rendering the product useless.

NICK MANNING, NATIONAL SALES MANAGER, *Prier Products Inc., Grandview, Mo.*

**Mailbox**

I was looking through an old issue of *This Old House* and realized I may be able to explain the puzzling house-design abnormalities Jeanne Marie Laskas wrote about in "The Previous Owners Did *What*?" [Off the Wall, November/December 1997]. First, the "doors to nowhere." It was once common in some areas to have such doors installed, usually on the second floor, because this would classify the house as unfinished, resulting in a tax break until a "somewhere" was built. Second, as for the author's friend whose house lacked a chimney: The previous owners may have chosen this solution because removing and roofing over a chimney is much cheaper than replacing a chimney that has fallen into disrepair. It's also easier to justify when that particular fireplace has become a vent for heat rather than a regularly used source of it.

T. RAMEY, *Maggie Valley, N.C.*

## punch list

*definition: a list of items incorrectly done or remaining to be finished on a construction job*

May 1998

- In the Directory listing for "The Poster: PVC Pipe and Fittings" (page 184), the contact information for NIBCO Inc. should have been 1516 Middlebury St., Elkhart, IN 46516; 800 343-5455, www.nibco.com.

November 1998

- In the Contributors column (page 10), the photo of Stephen M. Pullan should have been credited to Gregory Heisler.

ILLUSTRATION: JASON SCHNEIDER; PHOTO: JOHN GRUEN

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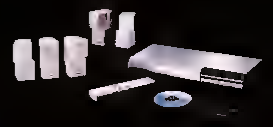

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# HESAYS

BY BROCK YATES

# SHESAYS

BY JEANNE MARIE LABKAS

## WHAT A KITCHEN SHOULD BE

Let's see now: The kitchen is a place for food preparation, a cozy haunt where, amid heady aromas issuing from hot ovens, sizzling fry pans and steaming colanders, the pleasures of cooking are celebrated on a daily basis. When it comes to cooking, however, I'm reminded of an observation by the famed master of the malapropism, Samuel Goldwyn: "Gentlemen, include me out." Alas, my culinary skills are limited to making instant coffee, boiling water for pasta, cleaning and slicing vegetables and lighting the oven before dawn for various Thanksgiving and Christmas dishes prepared by my wife, Pamela. Still, the kitchen is a place where I inevitably spend many of my waking hours.

Our kitchen at Farmstead in upstate New York is a 15-by-30-foot room with a pine-beamed ceiling and a vast center island bordered

I have an ugly kitchen. I know this. As surely as I am standing here chopping onions on a circa 1950 powder-blue countertop trimmed in metal and rubber, I know this. So why do I love this kitchen? Not because of the floor. Some presumably well-intentioned remodeler covered the floor with royal blue indoor-outdoor carpeting long before I got here. And not because of the walls—tiny light-green tiles patched over, here and there, with beige wallpaper. Furthermore, it's safe to assume that my love for this kitchen has nothing to do with the wagon-wheel chandelier that people are constantly bonking their heads on because the ceiling is so low.

"Ouch! Aw! Jeez!" my husband, Alex, says many times a week. "We've got to do something about that stupid

ILLUSTRATIONS BY MARK MATCHO

## HESAYS

by an old chopping block scavenged from a local meat market. A rare 18th-century corner cupboard holds Pamela's collection of Florentine pottery and enough cookbooks to supply a small library. An antique cherry table is the centerpiece of a breakfast area that commands a sensational view of the broad, wooded valley to the east. This warm and hospitable room is anything but tranquil, however. Pamela and I share the space with family members, friends, business associates, salespeople, passersby and anyone else willing to defy our English mastiff watchdog. This cast of thousands has transformed our cozy kitchen into a rural Grand Central Terminal.

For years, Pamela and I have engaged in a semantic dispute about what this room is really for. I refer to it as *our* kitchen, while she insists on calling it *her* kitchen. This is a reasonable disagreement, given that we employ the room for totally different purposes. She cooks there—with considerable skill and elan. To her dismay, though, I find the kitchen an ideal place for many non-cooking activities including the critical task of receiving, sorting and storing the mail. I'm addicted to magazines and subscribe to an absurd number of them. Add junk mail, bills, personal correspondence, three daily newspapers, and the result is a small forest of mashed, pulped wood that ends up on the kitchen table. Periodic cleanings only provide extra space for even larger accumulations of printed material.

I find the kitchen is also a terrific place to commune with our dogs, Guinness, the young mastiff male, and Amy, the West Highland white terrier, are marvelous animals, and I can't resist letting them in, usually when Pamela happens to be cooking. Guinness, who weighs 220 pounds, thinks it proper to be at Pamela's feet—no matter that she may be hoisting a cauldron of roiling broth from burner to sink. She puzzles over what to my fevered brain triggers the need to permit entry to the dogs. I have no logical answer except that mealtime is an occasion for socializing, and I see no reason to leave the dogs out of the fun.

I'm not only irresponsibly gregarious by nature. Like most mildly desperate self-employed people, I live and die by the phone. Worse, so does Pamela. This requires three phone lines, and one of the main terminals is in the kitchen. The commencement of cooking in this household apparently sends out a telepathic signal to hundreds of friends and associates, "The Yateses are about to eat. Call them immediately!" I inevitably answer the phone out of dim witted curiosity and the faint hope that Ed McMahon is on the line, offering riches. Invariably, I end up chatting with one of our friends or trying to fend off an obnoxious telemarketer just as Pamela is setting the main course on the table. I have yet to learn to let the phone ring. Indeed, I even accede to the temptation to make a few calls myself as the meal is being prepared.

Still, the kitchen at Farmstead remains a center of vitality and hope. Discount the madness, messes and confusion. Our kitchen—oops, *her* kitchen—remains a delightful component of country living, even if Pamela can only dream of what it might be like without the mail, the dogs, the crowds, the phone calls and, most of all, me. ■

## SHESAYS

"I'll make the brownies at halftime," my friend Nancy says. She's sitting in the family room watching the Miami Dolphins trounce the Pittsburgh Steelers. But at the same time, she's here—with me. Because the family room is part of the kitchen, it's all one large expanse separated by only a change in flooring. Mercifully, the blue carpet yields to polished hardwood floors as the kitchen turns into the family room. Nancy's daughter, Meghan, is on that floor, drawing a picture of my cat, which has sprung from the couch and is getting chased by my dog. The two of them circle my feet as I work the chili ingredients. Alex is on the phone at the kitchen table. Jack, Nancy's husband, is kneeling at the open refrigerator, organizing beer.

"I brought apple pie," says Ellen, who has walked in the back door—which opens directly into the family room. She lays her offering on the kitchen table, stepping over the phone cord, over Meghan, the dog and the cat to hand me a bottle of wine. Alex stands to give her a hello hug, knocking his head on the wagon wheel so the fixture swings crazily.

"Ouch! Aw! Jeez!"

My kitchen. This kitchen. For me, a great kitchen is only incidentally about appliances, high-tech gizmos and sleek design. The kitchen's defining characteristic is where it sits. How accessible it is, how integral it is to the people and other creatures we think of as family. A great kitchen is a place of nourishment where people gather. No matter how spiffy, a kitchen looks best when it has people in it, around it, through it.

My other kitchens, the beautiful ones, followed a different model. They were in renovated Victorian houses. When you think about it, those houses were conceived when kitchens were places for the help. And servants were not the same people who called the place home.

Although beautifully renovated and appointed, my former kitchens were separated from the main flow of the house. I can remember chopping onions on my fancy countertop, under the tiny halogen lights. I remember hearing laughter, far-away guffaws of friends down the hall, in the living room. While I stood there with my onions. Alone. I resented the onions, the kitchen, the skylights.

My current kitchen follows the farmhouse model. Farmhouse kitchens were conceived with families in mind. Places for cooking eggs just brought in from outside. For lunchtime stew with the neighbors. For homework. For a big table around which discipline is meted out, political stances taken and prayers said. Where a dog can chase a cat. And a kid can draw the cat. And a neighbor can drop by and make brownies. And where someone, to be sure, bonks his head on the wagon-wheel light. ■




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jan/feb/99

(extras)

# Shovel and Shed

Suffering from cabin fever and holiday weight-gain blues? Here's some good news: You can burn 150 calories by tackling around-the-house maintenance projects—often in less than an hour. As the snow melts away, so will your waistline.

**TO BURN 150 CALORIES**

| PROJECT | TIME |
|---|---|
| Shoveling snow | 15 minutes |
| Pushing a powered lawn mower | 29 minutes |
| Raking leaves | 32 minutes |
| Gardening | 30-45 minutes |
| Washing and waxing a car | 45-60 minutes |
| Washing windows or floors | 45-60 minutes |

## Greene Houses

**Nothing embodies the natural aesthetic of the Arts and Crafts movement—which blossomed a century ago in response to the soullessness of mass production—like the super-bungalows built by brother architects Charles and Henry Greene in Pasadena, California. Greene & Greene houses, with their rich interior wood and leaded-glass doors, still provide the same kind of antidote in the information age, and Americans are falling in love all over again. Architecture buff Brad Pitt recently hosted a dinner to raise money for Pasadena's Gamble House, a 1908 Greene & Greene residence now open to the public. Nearby, new owners of the Blacker house, the Greenes' 1907 masterpiece, have just finished restoring it. Meanwhile, *Greene & Greene. The Passion and the Legacy* by Randell L. Makinson and *Greene & Greene Masterworks* by Bruce Smith have been published almost simultaneously. These gorgeously photographed books show the Greenes at their best. Douglas fir timbers are left to weather gently. Boulders from Pasadena's arroyo are incorporated into chimney masonry. Cedar and teak paneling gleams. "How do you do it?" Frank Lloyd Wright once asked Charles Greene. History hasn't recorded his answer, but the houses speak for themselves.**

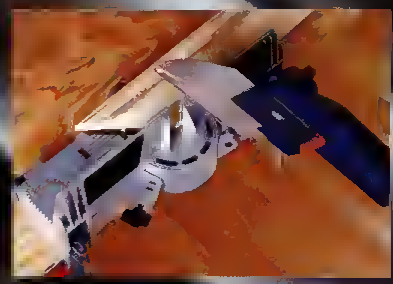
*The palatial "bungalows" built by California architects Charles and Henry Greene blend the Shingle Style with Japanese temple architecture—but are still unpretentious and welcoming. At their Blacker house, a massive porte cochere, above, draws visitors into the teak and fir entry hall, top*

MANUFACTURERS · MATERIALS · PRODUCTS · RESOURCES » PAGE 100

ILLUSTRATION: MARTIN MAYER. PHOTOS: ALEX WEITKOFF. *GREENE & GREENE MASTERWORKS*: ARCHITECTURE PRESS, CHRONICLE BOOKS, 1998. ©LANNI AND TOOL, MICHAEL GRIMM

## Best of Both Worlds

**Tight angled cuts in trim molding are hallmarks of fine carpentry but, until now, trim carpenters have had only two kinds of tools with which to make them: slow handsaws trapped in miter boxes and heavy, expensive power-miter saws with intimidating, whirling blades. Enter a third option: a 3½-pound power tool that marries the stiff, flat blade of a gentleman's backsaw to a 3.5-amp motor for lightning-fast back-and-forth power. Snap in the blade, and secure the tool to its cast aluminum miter table: The saw is ready to make precise vertical cuts—both left and right—between 90 and 45 degrees. Cutting at 2,000 to 2,900 strokes per minute, the saw leaves a smooth surface in trim up to 2¾ inches thick and 3⅝ inches high. The blades can cut wood or plastic, but keep them away from plaster or drywall; the dust corrupts the saw's internal workings. As a bonus, this genteel cousin to a reciprocating saw is useful for tricky floor work. Freed from the miter table and fitted with an offset blade, the saw turns into a handheld tool for making tight-to-the-corner flush cuts**



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# extras

## CALENDAR

**NORM ABRAM**

- January 16—National Association of Home Builders International Builders' Show, Dallas Convention Center, Dallas, Texas; 800-368-5242, 800-284-5306 for details faxed on demand, www.BuildersShow.com

**TOM SILVA**

- January 16—National Association of Home Builders International Builders' Show; details above

**STEVE THOMAS**

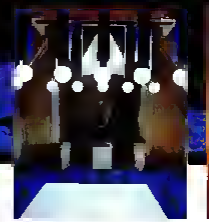
- January 15 to 17—National Association of Home Builders International Builders' Show; details above.
- February 5—Northeastern Retail Lumbermen's Association Show, World Trade Center, Boston, Massachusetts, 518-286-1010
- February 13 to 14—Orchard Supply Hardware How to Fair, San Mateo Expo Center, San Mateo, California; 408-365-2421
- February 19 to 20—Akron/Canton Home and Flower Show, John S. Knight Center, Akron, Ohio; 800-865-8859

**RICHARD TRETHEWEY**

- February 5 to 6—Spring Home & Garden Show, Novi Expo Center, Novi, Michigan; 248-737-4478

## Hook It

**When an extension cord becomes a pest, wrapping around legs and ladders, it's time to give it the hook. Weave the cord through this inexpensive, low-tech plastic J, and hang it from your belt—the cord stays obediently behind and doesn't disconnect. Need more lead to reach the highest screw? Pull gently for additional slack.**



*At Timberline Lodge, above, disco-era chandeliers, near right, are getting mothballed as fixtures such as a wrought-iron sconce, far right, are going up again.*

PHOTOS: CORD HOOK AND LASER RULER: ANDREW GRAY; TIMBERLINE LODGE: SUSAN SEUBERT

## Lightening Up

**Sitting 6,000 feet up Oregon's Mount Hood, Timberline Lodge is a legacy of the Works Progress Administration era, when hundreds of craftsmen and artisans created the massive wrought-iron fixtures and intricate wood carvings that grace the hand-hewn timber structure. "But beginning in the '60s, some people thought upgrading a building meant replacing the old with the contemporary," says Timberline curator Linny Adamsen. "Luckily, many of the old artifacts were stored in the attic, so we've been pulling them out ever since." Now the 71-room lodge is putting its multi-globed 1970s lights in the attic and installing hand-made fixtures more sympathetic to the building's "rustic-deco" roots. The lights will also be more efficient: Compact fluorescents will replace incandescent bulbs, preserving the lodge's softly lit ambience while using 40 to 50 percent less energy and lasting about 9,000 hours longer. The transformation will include historical replicas such as a hexagonal iron-and-white-glass chandelier in the conference wing and 54 square-shaped iron-banded ceiling fixtures in the guest-room hallways. The latter fixtures had been removed after repeated banging by falling ski tips—now outlawed inside, along with any disco balls.**

## Point and Measure

**Figuring the distance between A and B keeps getting easier—and more fun. New laser meters eliminate the need for a notepad, a ladder, a calculator and even a helper to hold the end of a tape. Stand up to 300 feet from a target (such as a wall or ceiling), aim a red dot and press a button. The tool gives a digital readout of the exact measurement, plus or minus 0.2 inch. The meter also stores dimensions and calculates square footage and cubic volume, making the tool "great for anyone who has to estimate demolition, landscaping, fire-damage-repair, carpeting or HVAC-system jobs," says *This Old House* contractor Tom Silva, who tried out the device at the Watertown project. "Outdoors, however, locating the red dot in the sun can be a bit tricky." At $900, the devices are priced for professionals but worth it for folks who feel more confident doing estimates when The Force is with them.**

## Matchmakers

**Whether from the phone book or by word of mouth, picking a contractor requires a leap of faith—which can sometimes feel more like a free fall. Now, a Web-based service provides a parachute of sorts by screening contractors before referring them to home owners. Click on www.improvenet.com, and detail a project's budget, time frame and location. After contacting local contractors, Improve Net E-mails you a free list of professional recommendations for those interested, along with their legal history, financial status, liability insurance and licensing credentials. Contractors pay to be included but are recommended only if they meet Improve Net's criteria. If you're considering businesses that aren't among the 600,000 subscribers, Improve Net will check their legal and credit backgrounds for $29 and review contracts for $35. Improve Net isn't a substitute for commonsense homework or legal counsel, but it does tell you more about a prospective contractor than either an advertisement or someone's brother-in-law can.**

# ASK **NORM**

"Be wary of tongue-and-groove flooring for a porch or deck. The grooves are moisture traps."

## PORCH FLOORING

My wife and I are building a new home, and we're having trouble finding flooring for the front porch. The usual material here is painted tongue-and-groove fir, which I've heard often fails almost as soon as it's laid down due to moisture damage. Local retailers tell me they can't get the square-edged fir I've seen you use on various projects. How do I find this flooring and install it for maximum durability?

ROBERT L. HARMON, *LINCOLN, ILL*

*You're wise to be wary of tongue-and-groove flooring for a porch or deck. The grooves are moisture traps. But I can't imagine why you can't find square-edged fir, it's one of the most common materials around. If your local home centers don't stock it, try a lumberyard. When you do find the lumber you need, make sure you space the planks so they can breathe, the gap should be approximately the diameter of a 2½-inch nail. Using painted planks is a problem. For one thing, paint never sticks well to fir. Also, since you're dealing with a horizontal surface, any moisture will sit right on top of the planks and inevitably cause paint to fail. Instead, apply clear wood sealer in the fall and spring for the first couple of years, then annually in the fall. If you use a stain, the results could be blotchy. Fir stains unevenly because it's hard in some spots and soft in others.*

## HIDDEN TREASURE

My husband and I are in the process of moving to an 1836 farmhouse. After we bought the farmhouse, we discovered the original house—a log cabin—had been hidden deep within extensive later construction. Can you give us some advice on how we should go about restoring the log cabin, much of which was covered with hideous paneling? We want to expose the massive logs and show them off.

SUE TURLEY, *EVANSVILLE, IND*

*Pray for the best, but prepare for the worst as you open up the walls to see what's underneath. If you're lucky, you'll find the paneling was simply tacked to the walls, leaving nothing but lots of nail holes to patch. On the other hand, you might uncover something like the extensive damage I found recently when I helped the Forest Service renovate a log cabin in Montana. The cabin was 30 miles from the closest road but, apparently during the Paneling Plague of the 1950s and 1960s, nothing and no one was safe. Somebody had actually hacked notches into all the logs to make room for studs to put up paneling. All those slots—and there were many of them—had to be repaired with filler blocks. Known as dutchmen, these blocks have to be cut and shaped to fit each log, then stained to match.*

## STYLISTIC MUDDLE

We've bought a 1970s split-level town house and want to give it a more Victorian feel inside and out. Is it foolish to consider making the house resemble a style from another period? Do you think such changes will increase the property value? I've heard that people who renovate seldom get their money back when they sell. Can you recommend any surefire upgrades that will increase the value of a house when it goes on the block?

DAVE MARCOFUL, *BENSALEM, PENN*

*Short of a total transformation, such as we did on Brian and Jan Igoe's house in Lexington, Massachusetts, a few seasons back, restyling a house from one era to another is like using paint and muslin to make two kids look like a horse for the school play. It requires an indulgent audience. The kind of restyling you're considering probably won't be convincing and could even devalue your house, attracting only bargain hunters. When it comes time to sell, you'll get the most value from simple exterior upgrades that boost a house's curb appeal. Start with the basics. Make sure you clean the house as well as paint and touch up where necessary. And keep the lawn cut and the shrubs trimmed.*

PHOTOS: KELLER & KELLER

## WET FIREPLACE

In the basement of my 1857 house, moisture is damaging an inlaid-stone fireplace my father built by hand about 45 years ago. I'm baffled because I'm confident I've done everything possible to keep the basement dry. That includes installing new gutters, making sure the ground is graded properly, patching and sealing cracks and running a dehumidifier on humid summer days. The basement can be damp at times, but it's never wet. Still, the mortar in the fireplace and on the walls is starting to crumble. Outside, the chimney is faring a bit better, but I am concerned about it also. Is there some kind of modern product, maybe a spray-on or brush-on solution, that can stabilize the old mortar?

ALLAN COTTER, *PRESCOTT, WIS*

*You may have moisture coming from the chimney, the one point of entry you haven't tended to. If so, the solution may be as simple as installing a chimney cap. Or the flashing may be failing. But I suspect moisture may not be your problem at all. It's possible that the mortar that is crumbling may not have been mixed properly to begin with. You'll probably have to chip all the loose mortar out of the joints and repoint the fireplace and chimney. As for a spray-on or brush-on solution, that's pretty much the Holy Grail of home repair. Lots of people are looking for it, and when one of them finds it, I hope he or she will tell me.*

## INSULATION PANELS

I'm having a new house built and want to make sure it's insulated properly. Temperatures here range from 30 degrees below zero up to 100 degrees (Fahrenheit), and we expect to run the heating-and-air-conditioning unit 10 months of the year. Plus, we have high humidity. My builder wants to install double-foil-faced foam insulation panels behind hardboard siding. But I'm concerned that the foil will act like a vapor barrier, causing sweating under the siding and subsequent rot. What do you suggest?

DARLENE FORHART, *KANSAS CITY, MO*

*I don't like double-foil-faced panels on the outside of a house, period, because they can cause moisture to condense inside and rot the frame. I'd rather see the panels put behind the drywall. That's what I did on my own house. Putting foil-faced insulation on the heated side of the wall creates a vapor barrier that should prevent most moisture from penetrating to the frame. All of the joints should be reinforced with aluminum tape so there is no break in the moisture seal, and the builder will have to use longer finish nails and drywall screws, bigger extension jambs on the windows and extendable electrical boxes.*

> "You don't want lumber in direct sunlight for long periods of time, because it will cook and turn to spaghetti."

## GUTTER MYSTERY

I have a late-19th-century Queen Anne house. Photos taken before 1917 show no gutters hanging from the soffit. Instead, there is some sort of trough built onto the roof about a foot from the edge. At first I thought the trough might be built into the roof, but that would require notches in the rafters. I've already checked in the attic, and the rafters I can see show no sign of having been notched, patched or replaced. This, therefore, was a surface installation and, since I'm replacing part of the old slate roof anyway, I'd like to do a faithful restoration and bring back the trough. Any advice?

ROBIN C. HOVIS, *MILLERSBURG, OHIO*

*The trough design could be a local variation on traditional gutters. If so, your public library or historical society might have more information about it. One thing to keep in mind is that this design might have disappeared because it didn't work well. In a location prone to icing, for example, it would probably cause trouble. On the other hand, maybe this trough gutter was just too expensive for ordinary folks, as trying to replicate it certainly would be today.*

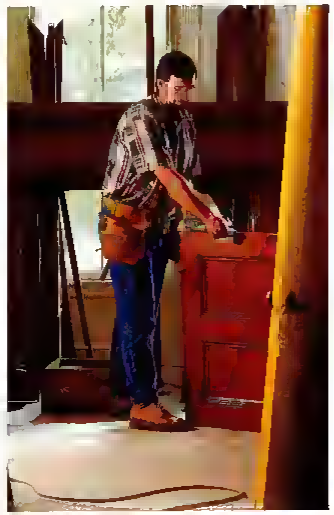
## LUMBER SEASONING

I have some walnut lumber I'm planning to air-dry for a year before using it to make furniture. I stacked the boards in pairs on 1-inch spacers, and now I see that some of the wood has become moldy. How do I get rid of the mold?

WES CARNEY, *LAWRENCEBURG, KY*

*If you're seeing mold, the wood isn't air drying. That means you're storing the wood in the wrong place or you've stacked it improperly. You shouldn't keep the stack on the shady side of the house or cover it so tightly that you don't get any air flow. On the other hand, you don't want lumber in direct sunlight for long periods of time, because it will cook and*

*turn into spaghetti. To properly air-dry, lumber should be stacked well off the ground as well as stickered (separated with spacers). Plus, there should be plenty of room on all sides for good air circulation. But how much mold is there? If you see only a little, that's nothing to worry about as long as the boards are all going to be surfaced later.*



## SIDING PLANER

My 50-year-old wooden garage is structurally sound, but the paint on the clapboard siding needs to be stripped. I think it might be better to remove the siding and then plane each board smooth before replacing and repainting. Got any tips?

BILL PARILLA, *PARK RIDGE, ILL.*

*Which do you have more of: time or money? Taking down clapboards requires a lot of time and patience. There's almost always a lot of splitting at the nail holes. And you risk even more breakage when you strip the boards and put them up again. In the end, you might find you would've been better off simply replacing all of the siding. You can also strip the clapboards without removing them. Special siding planers are available with vacuum attachments to protect you and your neighbors from lead-paint dust. They're hardly fast, though. The manufacturers claim siding planers can clean 1 square foot every 15 seconds, but that would be on a perfect surface. In the real world, the work doesn't go nearly so fast because planers don't cope well with surface irregularities in the wood. They tend to eat their way through bumps and leave bits of paint behind in the hollows. When you're finished planing, you'll still have a lot of hand-scraping to do.*

## POINT-OF-USE HEATER

I'd like to replace my gas-fired 40-gallon water heater with a tankless point-of-use heater, which is supposed to supply unlimited hot water. Can you shed light on other pros and cons, such as energy efficiency, ease of installation and durability. How large a unit would a family of four require?

MARK A. SCHEPSIS, *DE WITT, N.Y.*

*If your water heater is old and the tank is corroded, you may want to replace it with a modern, energy-efficient unit. But otherwise, a 40-gallon water heater should be sufficient to meet the needs of a family of four. Point-of-use heaters are great for situations where there is a limited demand for hot water. This Old House executive producer Russ Morash and his wife, Marian, have one at their summer house on Nantucket, Massachusetts. You get continuous water for one person taking a shower, but if you have more than one shower going at once and try to run the dishwasher at the same time, the supply of hot water can slow to a trickle. At times of peak demand, you'll likely need more than one point-of-use heater if you switch from a more conventional system.*

## LEAKY SHED

When we built a toolshed, we covered it with corrugated roofing because we'd used that material before successfully. This time, however, we're getting a lot of leakage. We've tried sealing the roofing with aluminum-fiber stickum, but no luck. We don't know what to do. Please help us.

MRS. DUANE BURGESS, *RIO DELL, CALIF.*

*Ninety-nine percent of the time, leaks in new doors, skylights and roofs occur not because of material failures but because the installation wasn't done right in the first place. That's seldom the kind of error you can fix with tubes of goo. On the other hand, the leakage problems you're experiencing could be El Niño at work. A lot of people in my area have discovered leaks they never knew they had, because suddenly it's been raining inches at a time. In either case, you may have to start over in order to get a watertight roof.*

## SHIM SOLUTION

Can you recommend a simple, no-nonsense way to set door and window jambs? I'm looking for something that eliminates the usual—and endless—need for shimming.

DAVID A. DESCHAMP, *GRAND JUNCTION, COLO.*

*Yes, there is an easy and effective solution: a jamb-adjustment screw. It consists of a long central screw that fastens to the frame. The screw rotates within a short threaded sleeve that connects to the jamb. Once the device is fully seated, the central screw can be backed out, pushing the jamb into position. Jamb-adjustment screws are a fairly recent innovation, and they are still sold primarily at lumberyards and specialty hardware stores rather than home centers.*

Send questions to Ask Norm, *This Old House* magazine, 1165 Avenue of the Americas, 27th floor, New York, NY 10036. Include a complete address and daytime phone number. Letters may be edited for clarity and brevity.

PHOTO: PASCAL BLANCHIN



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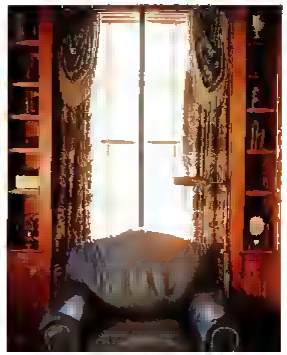
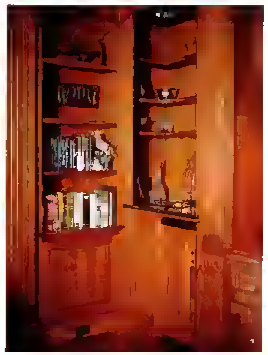
BY BRAD LEMLEY

# CHERRY

## Norm's Favorite Wood



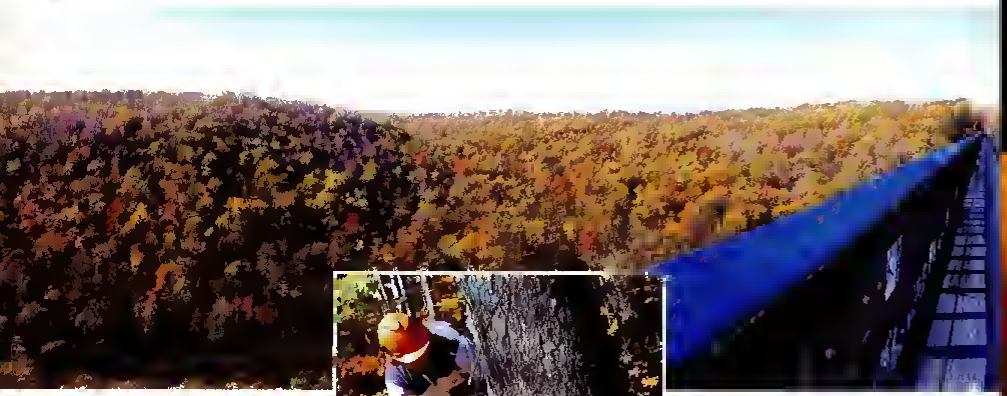


*Cabinetmaker Ben Tansky sawed, routed and planed his way through nearly 500 board feet of solid cherry and cherry plywood to create the intricate fireplace surround, raised panels and fluted moldings for this cozy library in Darien, Connecticut.*

Strolling through the trendsetting International Furniture Fair in Milan, Italy, three years ago, Thomas Moser was amazed. President of the Maine-based furniture company that bears his name, Moser had expected to see tables, chairs and bureaus fashioned from traditional European hardwoods such as oak and maple. Instead, he got the uncanny sense he was visiting one of his own showrooms, which are filled with exquisitely crafted cherry pieces. "At least a third of the furniture there was American black cherry," he says. "Ten years ago, Europeans had no idea that this wood existed. Now they're buying it up like mad."

Hot as it has become in Europe, cherry is even more popular here. Last year, more than 197 million board feet of cherry were dragged out of the forest—enough to plank a two-lane road from Houston to New York City—and then sawed, dried, planed and assembled into furniture, cabinets, doors, flooring and trim, almost anything that can be made of wood. "Now, nobody wants oak," says *This Old House* contractor Tom Silva. "We're putting cherry everywhere." In just four years, the retail price for a board foot of kiln-dried cherry has doubled, from $3 in March 1994 to $6 in May 1998. (A select grade of red oak, by comparison, runs about $3 a board foot.) But high prices have done little to dent the demand. "It's amazing how it's taken off," says Gene Parker, editor of the news-

PHOTOGRAPHS BY GRANT DELIN



*In the dense forests of Pennsylvania's Allegheny Plateau, top, one out of every five timber-sized trees is a cherry. As logger Ken Spoich of Kane Hardwoods takes down a rough barked 90-year-old cherry, inset, he cuts close to the ground in order to get every inch of the valuable wood.*

letter *Hardwood Market Report*. "People are just jumping onto this species."

A big part of cherry's appeal is its authentic character. It needs no stain or thick, plastic finish to bring out the rich, nearly translucent luster. "The other northern hardwoods—beech, ash, maple, birch—are fairly pale in color and not very interesting without stain," says Moser. "Cherry, black walnut and butternut are the only domestic hardwoods that feature intrinsic color to any degree. Butternut is rare—and too soft in any case. And walnut is seen as too dark, formal and masculine."

Cherry's deep auburn hue develops as the wood reacts to ultraviolet radiation and oxygen. Like a bather on a beach, a freshly cut board of cherry heartwood will change from light pink to tan after a single day in the sun. (The sapwood, which woodworkers do their best to trim off, stays a bland white.) After just a few weeks, the wood develops a patina that other hardwoods take decades to acquire. The result: instant heirlooms.

Cherry's sensitivity to sunlight also means that any piece near a window—say, a wainscot panel—will darken faster than a piece out of the sun's rays. Even so, wood consultant Jon Arno says, "in a decade, ambient light will even it out." An ultraviolet inhibiting varnish slows the darkening, but Arno doesn't understand why anyone would want that: "To me, the patina is the appeal." For cherry purists like Arno and Moser, using stains and other chemical concoctions to try to shortcut the darkening process is tantamount to defacing a Rembrandt. "Cherry's patina is impossible to fake," Arno says.

### Why Norm Chooses Cherry

*Cherry is TOH master carpenter Norm Abram's favorite hardwood. "It planes nicely. The piece sands very evenly and machines pretty well. But you have to use sharp tools and keep the stock—or tool—moving, or it will burn." Because the wood is only slightly harder than Douglas fir, Norm cautions against overusing cherry on floors: "It dings easily. I'd save it for a special place that's not going to get heavy traffic." A high concentration of prussic acid helps cherry resist rot, but few people choose to put this expensive wood outdoors. Norm finishes his cherry pieces with Danish oil. "To keep the piece looking great, just reapply the oil about once a year."*

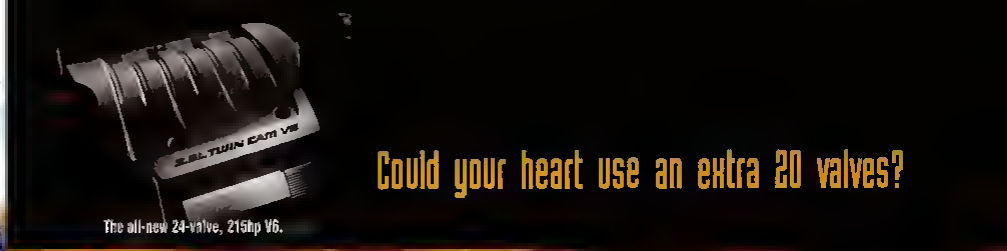
Black cherry (*Prunus serotina*) is a member of the rose family and belongs to a genus that includes some 400 species of fruiting trees—almond, apricot, peach, plum and the agricultural cherries such as Bing and Royal Ann. Of the entire Rosacaea family, only black cherry grows large enough to make usable boards. Mature trees reach 70 feet high with trunk diameters of about 2 feet. The largest, a towering 93-footer in Allegan County, Michigan, has a trunk that measures 5 feet 10 inches across and 18½ feet in circumference. Growing in thickets scattered throughout the eastern United States from the Canadian border to the Mexican highlands, black cherry is known by at least 14 different common names including cabinet cherry, chisos wild cherry, Edwards Plateau cherry and gila chokecherry. But in English-speaking woodshops and furniture stores, the wood is most often known simply as cherry.

Colonial craftsmen prized cherry, ranking it behind only the legendary and now virtually extinct West Indian mahogany (*Swietenia mahogoni*). Once dried, cherry is even more stable than black walnut. Shaker woodworkers, with their reverence for unadorned grace, particularly coveted cherry. As did Daniel Boone. In a 1948 classic, *A Natural History of Trees*, author Donald Culross Peattie relates that "Boone made himself several cherry caskets, and used occasionally to sleep in them, in his old age, but gave up all but his last to needy corpses."

By the 1930s, however, "We had depleted our supplies of reasonable-quality cherry," says Richard Jagels, a forest biologist at the University of Maine. Coupled with the rise of

PHOTOS: MICHAEL GRIMM



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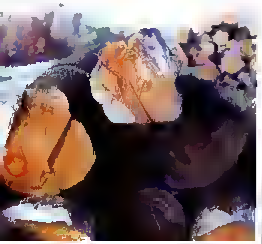

## Conserving Cherry

**Furniture maker Thomas Moser worries that cherry's newfound popularity threatens the stock of large, 70-to-120-year-old logs, above, that his company requires. Forest biologist Richard Jagels shares that concern, saying a slow erosion of genetic vigor is a real threat. "If you keep removing only the best trees, then removing the best of what grows back, a species' genetic integrity can be lost forever," he says. Moser insists that all of the premium-grade cherry his company buys must come from sawmills that process certified wood. (For wood to be certified, an independent auditor verifies that the trees are harvested sustainably, without damage to their genetic quality or the ecosystem.) He concedes that not all the cherry he uses is certified, because these same mills also get trees from uncertified sources. Nevertheless, he says, "We strongly support certification. We have to protect this wood, or it will go away."**

imported hardwoods in the early part of this century, cherry fell into semi-obscurity. In 1952, the book *Timbers of the World* identified cherry as "formerly prized for cabinetwork and fine furniture in the United States, but its principal use now is for making blocks for electrotypes."

Some 20 years ago, when Moser began fashioning furniture from the forgotten wood, it was a bold stroke, but he felt certain the public would respond if he emphasized cherry's inherent charms. He took design cues from Shaker minimalism and based his finishing procedure on Scandinavian techniques—three coats of hot, boiled linseed oil and either beeswax or carnauba wax over a surface sanded mirror-smooth with 60-micron paper. "This kind of finish never hardens. It's not a membrane," Moser says. "It just releases the natural beauty of the wood."

*Cherry's recent popularity has much to do with the creative ways furniture makers are using the wood. The roller-coaster curve on Thomas Moser's continuous-arm chair, for instance, requires ¼-inch-thick flitches knife sliced off a cherry veneer log, inset. Moser's crew glues them together, then tortures them into shape on a 2,000-pounds-per-square-inch jig. After 1½ hours of rasping and sanding, the arm is virtually indistinguishable from a piece of solid cherry.*

The cherry that Moser and many other woodworkers lust for comes primarily from the big trees growing in a 10,000-square-mile patch of the Allegheny Plateau in northwestern Pennsylvania, near where drillers sank the nation's first oil wells, in the 1860s. The oil boom sparked a logging frenzy, and virtually every tree in the region was sheared off to make charcoal to refine petroleum. Cherry rapidly colonizes open, newly cleared lands, thanks to the birds, raccoons and other animals that eat its small fruit, and cherry seedlings sprang up and flourished all over the plateau's sunny, denuded hillsides. Aided by a just-right mix of minerals, rain and temperature and a long period of neglect, many 19th-century saplings have matured into soaring, thick-trunked trees that yield what Moser calls "perfect logs," at least 16 inches in diameter with wide swaths of pure reddish heartwood. "Move north, through New York State, and you get green and brown hues. Go south into West Virginia, and you're contending with black pitch pockets."

At his Maine workshop—redolent of the lemon-camphor tang of freshly cut cherry—Moser emphasizes exacting craftsmanship, but he knows that the enduring appeal of his cherry furniture transcends tight dovetails. "At the end of the day, the great hidden truth of my business is that people admire our work so much, but they're really admiring the wood itself," he says. "The credit isn't ours. It goes to the material."

### Norm and the Cherry Table

*"Freshly planed and sanded cherry is very light-sensitive. Once, I sanded a cherry tabletop absolutely smooth and left a cardboard sign on it that said, 'Do not place anything on this tabletop.' When I came back a week later, the rest of the table had tanned, except for the spot under my sign. To even out the color, I had no choice but to go back and re-sand the entire top."*

PHOTOGRAPHS: MICHAEL GRIMM (CHAIR AND VENEER LOG); DAVID PRINCE



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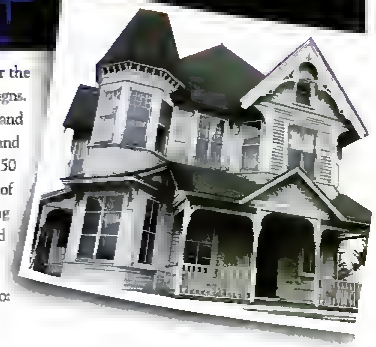

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BY CURTIS RIST

# COFFERED CEILINGS

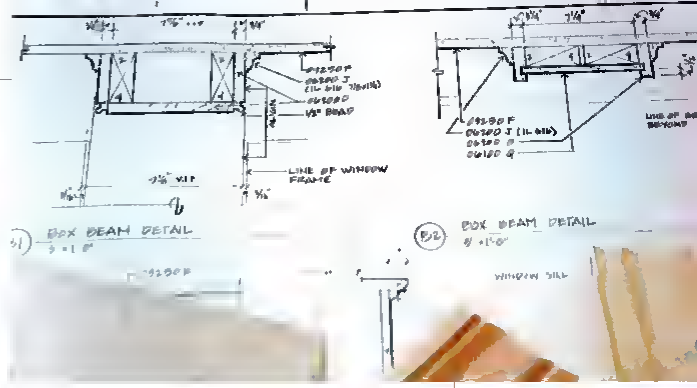
A cross-pattern of decorative timbers is something to beam about

PHOTOGRAPHS BY GRANT DELIN

On a tour of a 15th-century English manor house near Sherwood Forest, most visitors ogled the elaborate furnishings and artwork in the main rooms, but Mike and Cindy May found themselves staring in awe at the ceilings. Not the plain patches of white plaster familiar in American houses, they were covered with intersected beams that rivaled the furniture in beauty and created coziness in an otherwise cavernous room. "When we built our own house three years ago, we wanted to capture that same look," says May, who now has coffered ceilings in her Darien, Connecticut, living room, library and billiard room—her three favorite rooms, as it turns out. "The ceilings were expensive, but it's an architectural feature we just love," she says.

Elegant coffered ceilings—grids of decorative beams that create a series of recessed rectangles, squares or even octagons—are making a comeback. "They're especially wonderful in the public spaces inside a house—whether that means the living room, the dining room or a stair hall, says architect Gary Brewer of Robert A.M. Stern Architects in New York City. "It's putting your best foot forward to greet your guests." They're equally appealing in other rooms. An oak coffered ceiling lends grandeur to a master bedroom. Poplar coffers painted white make for a luscious frosting above a renovated kitchen. "When done well, coffered ceilings create a wonderful kind of dialogue between the beams on the ceiling and the furniture below," says Duo Dickinson, an architect in Madison, Connecticut.

*Coffered beams, such as the cherry ones that architect McKee Patterson designed for Cindy and Mike May's 14-by-14-foot library in Darien, Connecticut, can transform a ceiling from bland to beautiful. And in this room, where the walls are paneled in cherry as well, an unadorned plaster ceiling would have created "a room that resembles a box with the lid taken off," says Patterson.*




*Although their components look like solid beams, coffered ceilings are actually made from numerous planks and pieces of molding. This blueprint for a new kitchen ceiling in Riverside, Connecticut, designed by McKee Patterson shows nine separate components of paint-grade poplar needed to fashion the large beams, left, and seven for the smaller ones.*

Coffered ceilings began as a structural necessity. Ancient builders needed a grid of beams to support upper level floors. Over time, these were covered with increasingly ornate decorations and eventually earned their name because the recessed panels resembled coffers—boxes or chests used for storing valuables. "They're midway between furniture and the structure of the house itself," says Dickinson.

Although common throughout the Renaissance and especially in English manor houses, coffered ceilings all but disappeared in early American houses. "A 17th- or 18th-century ceiling might have one or two structural beams and possibly two crisscrosses—but this was hardly coffered," says Anne Grady, an architectural historian with the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities. "And by the Federal period, people didn't want any beams exposed at all." Tastes changed by the 1870s, with a Victorian revival of the Old English style, and coffered ceilings began to appear in large entrance halls as well as other rooms. They later became features of Shingle Style houses and are popular again "because our style now is so eclectic. Anything goes," Grady says.

The look of a coffered ceiling varies with the materials used to build it. A ceiling crisscrossed with stained hardwood, for instance, makes a suitable counterpoint to a paneled study. But, if done up in poplar or even plasterboard with wood trim, the beams can be painted—giving them a casual look complementing a family room or kitchen. "Coffered ceilings allow an almost infinite number of design possibilities," says architect McKee Patterson of Austin Patterson Disston Architects in Southport, Connecticut, who designed the ceilings in the Mays' house. The beams cost about $6 to $10 per lineal foot, "depending on the complexity of the design," says Peter Calzone, construction manager for the Wright Brothers Builders in Westport, Connecticut. He recently constructed one in the kitchen of a renovated 1910 Tudor house in Riverside. Coffers for a 20-by-20-foot room, he said, would cost about $2,000—probably less than the carpet below.

TOM SILVA SAYS...

"Building a coffered ceiling can definitely make a room. It finishes it off the same way wainscoting and beautiful floors do."

Decorated ceilings also help alter the perceived proportions of a room. For a dining room with a shallow ceiling height, McKee Patterson designed a coffered ceiling. Although it descended farther still into the room, it made the room look bigger. "Your eye reads the bottom of the beams and the ceiling, and together they give the illusion of a larger space," he says. For especially low ceilings—below 8 feet—he adds a faux coffered ceiling using planking 1 inch thick rather than the full beam treatment. "It adds some richness to the room and some texture"—without literally hitting people over the head with it.

Coffered ceilings aren't for everyone. In a simple house, they might look too fussy; in an old Colonial, they might seem out of place. "But where they do work, they work like magic," says Patterson. "They create a warmth and a comfort that no amount of drapery or carpeting can match." ■

*When cut, the pieces of the boxed beams fit together like a puzzle, as Trevor Oltran, a carpenter with Wright Brothers Builders, demonstrates using a model of the Riverside ceiling. When the real job begins, workers nail the components of the larger beams into the joists across the length of the ceiling, then fit the smaller ones into place. "It can take days of cutting to make sure it fits," says Oltran's supervisor, Real Breton. "The material costs nothing compared to the labor."*

MANUFACTURERS · MATERIALS · RESOURCES · PAGE 100

PHOTOGRAPH BY GRAHAM DEAN

The newly renovated 13-by-15-foot master bath looks serene now—with its marble floors, custom cherry vanities and freestanding tub—but a massive overhaul was required. Aside from radically changing the period style of the previous room, right, the owners wanted to eliminate the raised platform but discovered structural surprises beneath it.

BY CURTIS RIST

# BATHING BEAUTY

## A Victorian master bath suite in Short Hills that's long on livability

All alone on a house-hunting trip, Steven Goldstein, a business executive, found a dream: a mammoth 1885 Italianate Victorian complete with a piazza, a porte cochere and a grand winding staircase. "He bought it with no contingencies—without me even seeing it," says his wife, Varda Goldstein. Still, she was pleased, but her view of the Short Hills, New Jersey, landmark was more reserved. "It's got great details," she says of the six-bedroom behemoth, "as well as a few not-so-great ones." All the fixtures in the master bathroom, for instance—from sink and tub to toilet—were perched atop a strange tiled platform two steps off the floor. And there weren't any closets. "Well, there was something called a closet, but you couldn't hang anything in it. I told my husband it's going to take us three hours to get dressed in the morning, just to find our clothes. Something had to change."

Fortunately, when it comes to houses,

the Goldsteins are experts at making changes Traveling around the world on business, they have lived in nine houses during their 23-year marriage and renovated five of them. "Some of them we did because we wanted to, and some because we had to," says Varda Goldstein This house fell somewhere in the middle. Originally built as a finishing school for girls, the three-story structure had been renovated with great care by the previous owners, in the early 1990s The Goldsteins, however, wanted to build a separate bathroom for their 15-year-old son, Billy, and add a closet for their 18-year-old daughter, Lauren, a college freshman The bulk of the work would focus on their own master bedroom, bath and dressing room "At first I thought we were just going to do a little bit here, a little bit there," says contractor Ernie Hofmann. "Of course, as things turned out, it got a lot more involved."

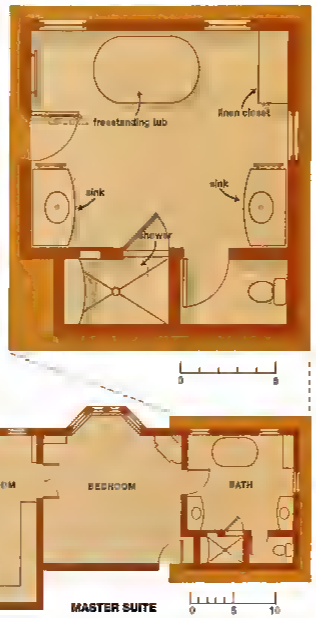
RICHARD TRETHEWEY SAYS:

*"Adding radiant floor heat to a bathroom is probably the single best investment in comfort you could ever make—especially when you consider that you're going to be in there most of the time without any clothes on."*

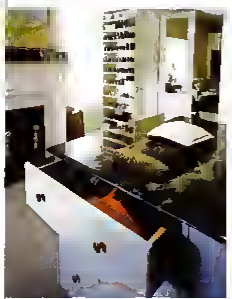
Just how involved quickly became evident The couple loathed the raised platform in the bathroom. "It was bizarre I wanted it out," says Varda Goldstein Ripping up the floor, Hofmann discovered the reason for the platform It covered up a 4-inch-diameter cast iron waste pipe that had been laid atop the floor joists during a previous renovation early in this century At that time, the pipe had not been tucked into the joists because it would have had to cross over a large wooden structural beam that could not be penetrated without the house falling down. After gutting the bathroom, Hofmann had to reroute a new waste line through a wall in the living room and dining room downstairs—at a cost of about $8,000

The surprises didn't end there For the Goldsteins, the whole point in renovating the bedroom and bathroom was to reconfigure them The existing bedroom had a sitting room attached to it and tiny closets "But, honestly, I never sit in my bedroom," says Goldstein. "I may collapse into bed

## THE MASTER SUITE PLAN




In laying out the 13-by-15-foot master bathroom for Steven and Varda Goldstein's 1880s house, architect John James created a casual feel by arranging the tub and vanities like furniture in e room and consigning the shower and toilet to adjacent alcoves. "That way, they don't become dominant features. They almost seem as if they are outside of the room," he says He reconfigured the mester suite by enlarging the bedroom, making it 15 by 17 feet and creeting e new door leading out into the hall. The suite had previously included e sitting room, but James turned that into a dressing room, which—at 14 by 19 feet—he calls "the mother of all dressing rooms." Because the room already contained e fireplace, "we went formal," he says. That included adding e 7-foot-long marble-topped island, useful for laying out clothes for business trips, "or just setting a cup of coffee on while getting dressed." The room (left) is "almost like a grend boudoir," James seys. "People spend a lot of time getting themselves ready for the dey end, with this, you feel like you're in a very nice space, as opposed to being stuck in a closet." One other advantage: Keeping all the clothes in e dressing room frees up the bedroom from e lot of clutter. "And that should make it a lot easier to get to sleep at night," he says.



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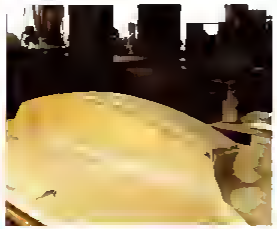
*Custom-made rosettes for the window trim and Edwardian-style details, such as the sink faucets and the three pendant light fixture, add to the room's period appeal.*

dead tired at the end of the day to watch TV. But sit? Never." Working with architect John James to make use of what they considered wasted space, they came up with a plan to turn the sitting room into a dressing room and enlarge the cramped bedroom by moving the partition wall 3 feet into the too-large bathroom. The result would be a triumvirate of balanced, useful rooms.

The solution seemed perfect, until Hofmann, project manager Alex Szewczuk and the crew once again began poking around with sledgehammers and crowbars. The partition wall turned out to be a major load-bearing wall. "Removing it could have brought the third floor crashing down," he says. Rather than abandoning plans, Hofmann brought in a structural engineer who specializes in historic buildings. He quickly came up with a plan to install laminated beams, which allowed the wall to be moved and the third story supported—at a cost of $18,000. Then Hofmann discovered that the span of the floor joists—about 17 feet—exceeded what the building code now allows by several inches. Bringing them up to code (no code had

## VANITY FAIR

Good-quality bathroom cabinetry can be ordered from a variety of manufacturers, but unusual items—such as the twin cherry vanities in the Goldsteins' bathroom—often require custom work. "We can do things like match details in bedroom furniture or existing trim, things you can't get anyplace else," says Angela Santoro of Creativa Woodcraft in Dover, New Jersey. In the Goldsteins' case, that hard-to-find detail included a curved-top drawer, which was difficult to find ready-made. To make the drawers, Rich Lusskin of the Creative Woodcraft factory cuts a wooden sandwich out of a layer of cherry veneer (top photo) glued atop several layers of straight-grained plywood known as wiggle wood because it bends so easily. The sandwich is pressed onto a sturdy wooden form built out of ¾-inch plywood. Rather than clamping the wood in place while waiting for the glue to set, Lusskin uses a process called vacuum-bagging. He slips the entire form into a tough 40-millimeter-thick polyurethane bag and seals it. Using a vacuum pump, he sucks out all the air in the bag until it draws tightly against the form—with a pressure of about 2,000 pounds per square foot (middle photo). When the vanities are completely built, Santoro covers the unstained cherry with three coats of catalyzed lacquer, and sands between each coat with 320-grit paper. He does not use a polyurethane finish coat because he thinks the final look tends to be artificial. "There's a fine line between making a cabinet as durable as possible and making it look like it's been dipped in plastic." When installed (bottom photo, Julio Belloso preps the vanity for a marble countertop), the finished pieces are stunning, the result of 160 hours of labor.



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## TOOLS FOR TILING

**Marble and other natural stone tiles may look like they glece together without effort, "but believe me, you have to work at it," says Vincent Carramusa of BCG Marble & Granite Fabricators. "I'm telling you, it's an art."**

**While ordinary ceramic tiles can be cut by scoring their faces and snagging them in half, the brittle ⅜-inch-thick marble tiles for the Goldsteins' master bath required considerably more machinery. The most important is a wet saw, which spins a smooth-rimmed 5-millimeter-thick blade encrusted with 32 industrial diamonds per square inch. They slice quickly through the hard stone as a continuous stream of cool water keeps the smooth-rimmed blade from warping under the heat. Because the blade can't cut curves, Carramusa uses another method to fit tiles around bathroom fixtures: 1) He traces the curve onto the marble with a wax marker and makes a series of cuts ¼ inch apart at right angles to the mark. 2) Then he carefully breaks off the narrow bits of marble with carbide-tipped nippers. 3) A 4-inch diamond-blade grinder smooths the rough edge left by the niggers. 4) Once the tile is cut, Carramusa smears thin-set mortar on the floor with a ⅜-inch notched trowel. Using the same trowel, he then buttens more thin-set over the entire back side of the tile. "If you just use a flat trowel, the mortar will be thick in some spots, thin in others, and it could eventually fall off," he says. Two other crucial tools for tile work: a margin trowel, which cleans mortar off the edges, and a sponge, which mops up after the final grouting. "Nothing can ruin good work faster than a messy grout job," Carramusa says.**

existed when the joists originally were installed) called for bolting a laminated beam to each one. That cost $8,000, but the structural ordeal wasn't over yet. A major dip in the flooring on the third floor—and a companion dip in the master bathroom ceiling below—proved to be more than a vague "settling" problem. "Two of the posts upstairs were resting on the floor joists instead of on beams that could carry the weight," says Hofmann. In came the engineer with more laminated beams as well as another bill—this one for $3,000. "Every time I hear someone call, 'Mrs. Goldstein!' I cringe," says the renovation-weary homeowner. "I know it's going to be bad news."

**TOM SILVA SAYS.**

*When adding a tiled shower, make sure to use cement backer board rather than ordinary plasterboard under the tile. "If you put the wrong stuff on, it will absorb moisture, and your tiles will fall away. Cement board, however, is indestructible."*

For the bath itself, the Goldsteins went for a low-key yet elegant approach. The architect designed a 13 by 15-foot room with toilet and shower in alcoves, a freestanding tub positioned between two windows, and a pair of custom-built curved cherry vanities along opposite walls. The existing Edwardian-style tub faucets were reused, and the architect specified custom-made rosettes for the door and window surrounds to match the other rosettes already in the house. "The idea wasn't to go back to an exact period in time, but to give the room an older feel, like it's been there all along," says James.

Helping that ambience is an absence of radiators. The Goldsteins opted for radiant floor heating set into lightweight concrete, at a cost of about $5,000. It takes the chill

PHOTOS: ERIK RANK.

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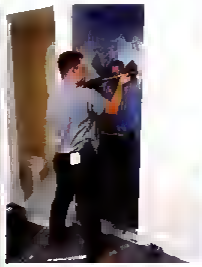
*The porcelain tub is new but takes on a period look with the addition of vintage-style fittings. The chrome faucet set is mounted on stems leading to water pipes in the floor.*

out of the white Carrara marble tiles covering the floor and shower.

When all was nearly done, there remained one more unforeseen bill brought about by the renovation. All that smashing of plaster from the demolition and what eventually turned into a whole-house makeover left the place swirling in dust. Getting rid of it turned out to be a full-time job for a separate work crew, which pored over every inch of the house. "You won't believe this, but my cleaning bill was $6,000," says Goldstein. "And the vacuum cleaner bag still gets filled up every time it's on."

Even so, she doesn't count this as the hardest of the five renovations. That honor goes to the first one, a 40-year-old Colonial just down the road in Short Hills. "Then, we didn't know what we were doing at all." But this ranks as the biggest. She manages to keep calm, as a workman bellows from up above, "Mrs. Goldstein!" ■

*To prepare one of the cherry vanities for an undermounted sink, Julio Belloso, left, takes a "very, very careful" pass with a jigsaw to trim the frame inside so that the sink will fit. Coworker Jorge A. Cisnero, right, affixes the sink to the green marble countertop with bolts, then applies silicone caulk to the perimeter of the entire countertop underside. When the silicone sets, the whole unit will be caulked and bolted into place.*



*To install the frameless shower door, left, Jamie O'Brien bores a hole for a hinge screw. Made of ⅜-inch clear tempered glass, the door is held in place by two wall-to-glass hinges. The ¼-inch-thick clear mirror above the vanity, right, is muscled into place by O'Brien, with an assist from Mike Granata, and affixed to the wall with three types of mirror mastic, adhesives formulated so they do not attack the mirror's silver coating.*

PHOTOS, TOP: BRANT DELIN; BOTTOM: ERIK RANK



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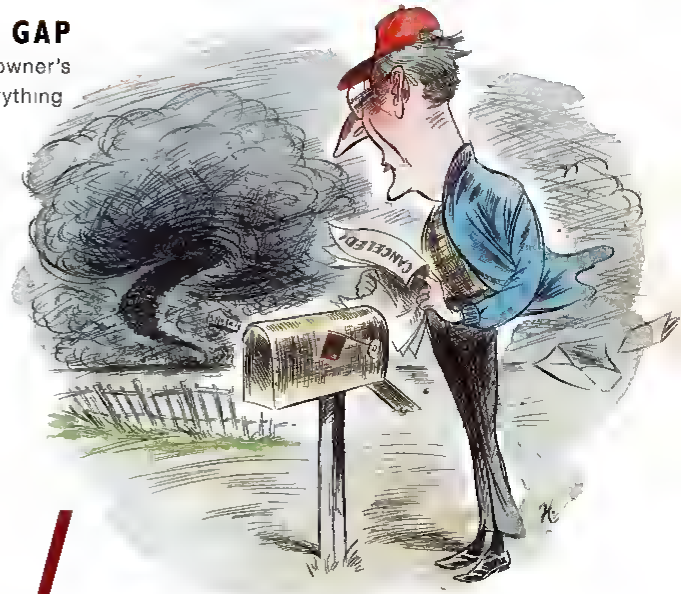
BY PETER KEATING

# THE INSURANCE GAP

Say good-bye to home owner's policies that cover everything




When Thomas Del Borello bought his town house in Glen Cove, New York, in 1988, getting home owner's insurance was no big deal. As he had done several times before, he simply shopped around and found a good policy at a decent price: $1,140 a year for a property worth about $400,000. But Del Borello's annual premium rose steadily—and steeply—to $2,600 last year. Then his insurer took an even more drastic step. Although Del Borello had never missed a payment and had filed only one major claim, the company canceled his coverage.

Most home owners haven't seen their rates double or faced an outright cancellation, but Del Borello's experience reflects fundamental changes sweeping through the insurance business Hurt by a rise in natural disasters, underwriters have begun providing customers with less coverage and charging them more for it. Between 1992 and 1997, the average home owner's premium jumped 42 percent, according to data from Conning Insurance Research & Publications, a firm that studies policy prices and the cost of claims. Insurers are also phasing out guaranteed replacement provisions, which pay for completely rebuilding a house if it is destroyed. In regions deemed disaster-prone, some companies are going so far as to refuse certain types of coverage and, as Del Borello found out, to cancel it altogether.

Insurance companies haven't always been so risk-averse. Since WorldWar II, insurers have enjoyed mostly sunny days, with only an occasional earthquake, hurricane or nor'easter. During the same time, millions

ILLUSTRATION BY GARY HOVLAND